

TOTAL REPEAL.

SPEECH

R. COBDEN, ESQ., M.P.,

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, ON MONDAY, MAY 15.

Mr. COBDEN said: I think we may fairly consider the speech of the hon. member for Birmingham as an episode in this debate. (A laugh.) I was going to remark that by hon. gentlemen opposite, and by many upon this side of the house, although we have had five nights' debate, the question proposed by the hon. member for Wolverhampton has been scarcely touched, that is, how far you are justified in maintaining a law which restricts the supply of food to the people of this country. (Hear, hear.) In supporting the present corn law, you support a law which inflicts scarcity on the people. You do that, or you do nothing. (Hear, hear.) You cannot operate in any way by this law, but by inflicting scarcity on the people. Entertain that proposition, and you cannot escape it, and, if it is true, how many of you will dare to vote for the continuance of the present law? (Cheers.) You cannot enhance the price of corn, or any other article, but by restricting the supply. Are you justified in doing this, for the purpose of raising your prices? (Hear, hear.) Without attributing motives to hon. gentlemen opposite, I tell them, and they may rely upon it as being true, that they are in a false position when they have to deprecate the imputation of motives. We never hear of a just judge on the bench fearing the imputation of motives. (Hear, hear.) But I will not impute motives, although they have been imputed by hon. and right hon. gentlemen opposite. Dowries, settlements, mortgages, have all been avowed as motives from the benches opposite; (Hear, hear;) but I will take things as I find them. Upon what ground do you raise the price of corn? For the benefit of the agricultural interest. You have not, in the whole course of the debate, touched upon the farmers' or agricultural labourers' interest in this question. No; hon. gentlemen opposite, who represent counties, instead of taking up the old theme,

and showing the benefit of this law to farmers and to farmers' labourers, have been smitten with a new light. They have taken the statistics of commerce and the cotton trade to argue from. Will the hon. member for Shoreham, who took the statistics which the right hon. baronet, four years ago, cast aside, tell the house how it is you do not take the agricultural view of the question, and show the farmers' interest in it? There is something ominous in your course. Shall I tell you the reason? Because the present condition of the farmers and labourers of this country is the severest condemnation of the corn laws that can possibly be produced. (Cheers.) During the whole operation of this law, or during that time when prices were highest under this law, the condition of the agricultural labourers was at the worst. (Cries of "No," and "Yes.") An hon. gentleman opposite says "No." Has he looked at the state of pauperism of this country in the last return which was laid before the house? There he will find that up to Lady Day, 1840, the proportion of paupers in the different counties in this country showed that the ten which stood highest in the list were ten of the purely agricultural counties, and *that* after your law had for three years maintained corn at 67s. per quarter. (Hear, hear.) If anything could have benefited the labourer, it should have been three years of high prices, and after trade had suffered the greatest depression in consequence of your law. If the agricultural labourer had not prospered up to the year 1840, what has been his condition since? The returns of pauperism show an increase in the number of the poor; and what is the present condition of the labourer in the agricultural districts? Is not crime increasing in the same proportion as pauperism has increased? (Hear, hear, hear.) Why, in some of the excursions I have made into your regions (Cries of "Oh, oh!") I

heard it stated that the actual returns of your petty sessions and your assizes furnish no criterion as to the state of demoralization in your districts; nay, I heard that such was the extent of petty pilfering and crime that you are obliged to wink at it, or you would not be able to carry out the business of your criminal courts. (Cries of "No, no.") I heard that both in Somersetshire and in Wiltshire. (Renewed cries of "No, no.") Hon. gentlemen may cry, "No, no," but there is an intelligent audience outside which knows that I am stating the truth. And what are the crimes these poor people are brought up for? Why, one old woman for stealing sticks of the value of three halfpence was sentenced to a fine of 15s. Another case was a charge for stealing turnip tops; and at Chichester an individual had been convicted of stealing mould from the Duke of Richmond. Such was the state of poverty and distress that they were glad to steal the very earth. Again, what was the fact urged by the hon. member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes) in extenuation of the condition of his labouring poor but this? that he allowed them to gather up the sticks which were blown from the trees in his park. It was brought forward as a proof of the hon. member's benevolence that he allowed his labourers to gather the crows' nests which were blown from the trees; (Cries of "Oh, oh;") and what does all this argue? Why, it argues that which you cannot deny, namely, that the agricultural peasantry of this country are in a state of the deepest suffering at this moment, and that if there has been any benefit from the corn laws they at least have not derived one particle of a share of it. I now come to the farmer, and I ask how it is that you who support this law have not adduced the case of the farmer? Are there no farmers' friends present who will state his condition? (Hear, hear.) You know that his capital is wasting away—that he cannot employ his labourers—and why? Because that money which should go to pay them is absorbed in your rents. (Cries of "No, no.") Hon. gentlemen opposite cry "No, no," but the farmers of this country will corroborate me, and that you well know. Does the hon. and gallant member for Sussex (Colonel Wyndham) say "No?" If so, I leave the farmers of Sussex to say whether I am uttering the truth or not.

Colonel WYNDHAM: Go to Sussex.

Mr. COBDEN: The hon. and gallant member tells me to go to Sussex. I mean to do so; and perhaps the hon. and gallant member will meet me there. (Hear, hear, from the opposition benches.) Now, I want to ask

what benefit the farmer ever derived from the corn laws? I have asked the question of hundreds, nay thousands of farmers, and as I am now in the presence of landlords, I ask it of you. I ask you to go back to the corn law of 1815. What was the object of the corn law of 1815? Why, to keep up the price of wheat at 80s. per quarter. Did it produce that effect? No; for in 1822, seven years afterwards, wheat was sold as low as 42s., and yet your agents and valuers valued to your tenants upon the calculation that they would get 80s. per quarter for their wheat. You cannot deny that. (Hear, hear, from the opposition benches.) And what was the consequence? Why, in 1822, the farmers were ruined by hundreds, nay thousands. One newspaper in Norwich contained 120 advertisements of the sale of stock in one day. The farmers then came to ask you for another law. You appointed committees, you went through the farce of inquiring into agricultural distress, and you passed another law, that of the year 1828, giving the sliding-scale protection to secure them 64s. per quarter for their wheat; and then, again, the red-tape men went about to value your farms on the calculation that the price obtained would be 64s. Another seven years elapsed, and then wheat was selling at 36s. Then came general distress again, and an application for a fresh committee. You gave them another act; and I now come to the act passed in 1841 by the right hon. baronet at the head of the government, and now the farmers are again distressed, and blame the right hon. baronet for deceiving them. (Cries of "No, no.") They do blame, and they are justified in blaming the right hon. baronet, and I will tell you why. The right hon. baronet, in the speech in which he proposed that law, said that he intended it to give to the farmer, as far as legislation could give it, 56s. per quarter for his corn. Now, the right hon. baronet will remember that I called his attention at the time to that point. I saw the importance of it then, and I see it now, and I wish the House to see clearly how the matter stands. The right hon. baronet said, that on taking a comprehensive view of the cost of production and the then state of the country, he thought if he could secure the farmer a price not rising higher than 58s., nor going lower than 54s., that these were about the prices the farmer ought to obtain. It is true that afterwards, in the course of the same speech, the right hon. baronet said that no legislation could secure that price. (Hear, hear.) Now, I do not charge the right hon. baronet with intending to deceive

the farmers, I do not attribute motives to the right hon. baronet; but this I do say, that in dealing with plain and simple men, men accustomed to straightforward and intelligible language, this was calculated, however intended, to mislead the farmers in their calculations. But it was a most convenient thing for the landlords to go to the tenant with a promise to secure him 56s. per quarter for his wheat; and it was very convenient for the right honourable baronet to say, at the same time, that though the law purports to give you 56s. per quarter, still I have not the power to secure it to you. And now, what is the price? 45s. or 46s., instead of 56s. The right hon. baronet distinctly says now, he never intended to maintain the price, and that he could not maintain it. Now, then, I ask, what is this legislation for? (Hear, hear.) I ask what it means?—what it has meant from 1815 downwards? I will not say what the motives of its promoters have been; but the effect has been one continued juggle played off upon the farmers, enabling the landlords to obtain artificial rents, which, being paid out of the farmer's capital, occasions loss to him, while the landlords are enabled to profit by it, owing to the competition among tenants for farms. (Hear, hear.) We will not separate this night until we have a perfect understanding of what you do propose to do for the farmer. I ask the right hon. baronet opposite, when he talks of the prices which the farmers should obtain, whether he can prevent wheat from falling as low as 36s.?—whether he can ensure it from falling as low as 30s.? As the right hon. gentleman says nothing, I will assume that this house cannot secure to the farmer a price of 30s. per quarter. Let this go forth; let there be, if you please, no ambiguity upon the point—no more deception; let the farmer perfectly understand that his prosperity depends upon that of his customers—that the insane policy of this house has been to ruin his customers, and that acts of parliament to keep up prices are mere frauds to put rents into the landlord's pockets, and enable him to juggle his tenants. (Cheers, and Hear, hear.) Now, we shall soon be able to dispose of some other sophistries upon the corn laws. We are told that the corn laws are intended to compensate certain parties for excessive burdens. That is to say, that the landowners, who have had the absolute command of the legislature of the country, and who, to a late period, did not permit a man to vote unless he swore he was a landowner—have been such disinterested angels (for no human being would do as much) as to lay excessive burdens upon their own

shoulders; and then, when they found it necessary to re-adjust taxation and relieve themselves, they do it by passing a corn law, and then come forward and confess that the law is not operative. (Hear.) Now, in the first place, I say that the disinterestedness of the landlords in this instance surpasses all human perfection; it is perfectly angelic. (Loud laughter.) But, unfortunately, the contrary to the proposition of excessive burdens falling on land is so notorious that to say a word upon the subject would be a work of supererogation. Let a copy of the statutes be sent, if it were possible, to another planet, without one word of comment, and the inhabitants of that sphere would at once say, "These laws were passed by landlords." (Laughter and cheers.) The partiality of your legislation is notorious; but if you had been really so disinterested, is it not likely, when you found out your real condition, that you would have put taxation fairly upon the shoulders of the people, instead of substituting a clumsy law, which you admit does not reimburse you at all? (Hear.) Now we come to another view of this question. We have the confessions of the right hon. baronet the Paymaster of the Forces, (Sir E. Knatchbull,) and of the hon. member for Wiltshire, (Mr. Bennett,) the one to the effect that the corn law goes to pay marriage settlements, and the other that it goes to pay mortgages. Now, if it goes to pay these, how can it pay the farmer? (Loud cheers.) And if you can't ensure the operation of the law, if after you have passed it you are obliged to confess that you cannot ensure its operation—why, then, who pays the dowries and the settlements? (Repeated cheers.) Why, in that case, they must be paid out of the pockets of the farmers. (Loud and protracted cheering.) You have confessed that a law cannot secure prices, but as mortgages and settlements are paid, then I say that you have confessed that the money comes from the farmers, and surely this is sufficient to account for their distress. (Renewed cheers.) I contend, then, that if this law creates a profit at all, that profit passes into rent. (Hear, hear.) And this proposition rests on more than the admission of the Paymaster of the Forces, or of the honourable member for Wiltshire. We have other acknowledgments of the fact coming from still higher authority. See a transaction of Mr. Gladstone, of Fasque, in Kincardineshire, of which I have an account in a paper in my pocket. Mr. Gladstone was applied to to reduce his rents, and he writes a letter to his agent, telling him, and his confession is worth something, as

the confession of a prudent and sagacious merchant, telling him that he did not look at the alteration in the corn law as calculated to reduce prices, and that consequently he did not feel himself bound to reduce his rents. Now this is a clear admission that the benefit from the law goes into the shape of rent. (Cheers.) But this is not all! There is his Grace the Duke of Richmond. ("Oh! oh!") The other day he was visiting his tenants in Scotland, dining with them, and looking over his estates, and in one of his speeches he told them, whilst speaking of the alteration in the corn law, that he was not the man to hold his tenants to any bargain they had made under circumstances which had been altered, and that if they wished it he was willing that they should throw up their leases and return their farms into his hands. (Hear, hear.) Now what does that amount to? Why, merely that the corn law influences the rent! (Hear, hear.) It means that or nothing; although I must say such a speech shows very little care for the farmer, who probably a dozen years ago purchased stock and went into his farm, and is now told, when probably the price of his stock has fallen 40 per cent., that if he pleases he may sell off his stock, leave his farm, retire from his connexion with the noble duke, and get another landlord where he may. (Cheers.) All this shows, then, that if the corn law operates to cause a profit at all, it also operates to put that profit into the pockets of the landlord. Now do not suppose that I wish to deprive you of your rents; I wish you to have your rents; but what I say is, don't come here to raise them by legislative enactments. (Cheers.) I think you may have as good rents without a corn law as with it, and what I say is this, that when you come here to raise the price of corn under the pretence of helping the farmer and the farm labourer, whilst in reality you are only going to help yourselves, then, I say, you are neither dealing fairly by the farmer, nor yet by the country at large; (Cheers;) and, mind me, this is just the position in which you stand with the country. You have deceived the farmers, and, feeling that you have deceived them, they have a right to ask, how you intend to benefit them?—nay, more, they have a right to inquire into your rentals, and find out how you have benefited yourselves. (Groans, and cries of "Oh, oh!") Yes, I say they have a right to inquire into your rentals. ("Oh, oh!" and laughter.) The hon. member for Sussex (Colonel Wyndham) laughs, and truly it would be laughable enough were he to come to me to inquire into the profits of my business;

but, then, he should remember that I do not ask for a law to enhance the profits of my business. (Loud and repeated cheers.) He, on the contrary, is the strenuous supporter of a law which, in its effect—whatever may be its intention—benefits his own class and no other class whatever. (Renewed cheers, and cries of "Oh, oh!") This language, I dare say, is new to the house. I dare say it is strange and unexpected in this place; but it is the language I am accustomed to use on this subject out of doors, and I do not wish to say anything behind your backs that I am not prepared to say before your faces. (Hear, hear.) And here let me ask what progress has been made in rents? Since 1793 rents in this country have doubled. I have returns in my pocket sent in by the clergy of Scotland, from which it appears that the rental of that country has increased in the same time three fold. (Hear, hear.) In England rents have not increased to that extent; but I can say with safety that they have more than doubled; (Hear, hear;) and there is something beyond even this. You have had a considerable advance in rents since 1828. There has been a great rise since that year. I hold in my hand a return of the rents of the corporation lands of the city of Lincoln since 1828. I see the hon. member for Lincoln, (Colonel Sibthorp) in his place, ("Hear, hear," from Colonel Sibthorp, followed by loud laughter.) Now, I have a return of the property of the city corporation, it is nearly all agricultural property, and I find that that rental has increased 50 per cent. since the year 1829. Now, I do not say that the whole rental of the kingdom has increased in the same proportion, but I do say that we have a right to inquire what is the increase in that rental.

COLONEL SIBTHORP: But I won't tell you. (A laugh.)

MR. COBDEN: The hon. member for Lincoln says he won't tell me; but I will tell him that nothing is so easy as to learn the history of rents in this country, for there is scarcely a village in England in which there is not some old man who can tell what was the price of land in his parish through many succeeding years. (Cheering.) I say it is the business of the farmer and the poor labourer to know the progress which rents have made since the corn law passed, and if they find that whilst in the one case they are losing all their capital, and in the other their condition is deteriorating, and they are obliged to put up with a potatoe diet; if they find, I say, that whilst this has been going on, rents have increased and are increasing, then I contend, they will have a proof

that this law was passed for the landlords, and that it operates for their benefit and their benefit only. (Applause, and cries of "Oh, oh!") I know that this is a sore subject; but I am bound to make it known that this is not the only way in which you have profited by political delusions. I will now show you another view of the question. You have made the corn law the subject of political outcry in the counties. You have made it a church and state question, and at the same time you have made the farmers your stepping-stones to political power. And for what has this been done? (Hear, hear.) I will take the last general election. At the last election the "farmers' friends" were running through the country, and with the purest and most disinterested intentions, no doubt, were making all sorts of promises to the agriculturists. "Well," said the hon. member, "well, there they are." (Loud ironical cheers from the opposition benches.) There they are, some of them sitting on the Treasury bench. (Renewed cheers.) The right hon. baronet at the head of the government, (Sir R. Peel,) he made a speech at Tamworth as the "farmers' friend." The hon. member for Essex says he quoted it repeatedly, but I don't think he quotes it now. (Renewed cheers.) As for the right hon. baronet, however, with all his ability, and with his thirty years' parliamentary experience, he might, and most probably he would, have obtained the situation he now holds whatever might have been the circumstances of the time. The post was due to him, perhaps, for his talents; so of him I shall say no more just now. (Hear, hear.) But there is another right hon. baronet very near him; I mean the Paymaster of the Forces (Sir E. Knatchbull.) There is no disturbing force in him. (Laughter.) The right hon. member is the "farmers' friend." (Hear, hear.) There he sits. (Renewed cheers.) O I was struck the other night at the fervour with which the hon. member for Wallingford (Mr. Blackstone) apostrophized this "farmers' friend," when, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, he said, "O if the Paymaster of the Forces were himself again! A few years back he would not have treated the farmer so." (Loud laughter, and cries of "Question.") "Question!" ay, it is not a very pleasant one, certainly; but it is the question. (Great cheering from the opposition benches.) I don't complain of the Paymaster of the Forces; I have no reason. He has made a speech which is more to the point, which is better calculated to serve the cause than any thing that has occurred in this debate, excepting, perhaps, his own explanation. (Laughter.) I don't complain

of him; I pass on. There is a noble duke (Newcastle) who is a "farmers' friend," and he has a son (Lord Lincoln) in the woods and forests. The noble lord, I dare say, performs his duty efficiently; but I want to show the farmers of England, of whom there is not one genuine specimen in this house, who they are who profit by this law. ("Question," and cheers.) Well, then, there is a noble duke (Buckingham) who is the "farmers' friend" *par excellence!* He has reached the summit of rank already. He has no son requiring a place under government. But one prize he had not, and that he soon obtained, I mean the blue riband. (Loud cheers, and cries of "Oh.") Now, these are but the outward and visible signs of the gains of this triumph; but whilst all this patronage, and all these honours have been showered on the "farmers' friends," what have the farmers got themselves? (Loud cheers, followed by cries of "Question.") You think this is not the question, but I can tell you we have no hope of the salvation of the country but by showing the farmers how you have cajoled them. (Hear, hear.) You taught the farmers to believe that if they elected you, their "friends," to parliament, you would speedily repay them for their trouble. They allowed themselves to be driven to the poll by their landlords who raised this cry; and they believed the landlords could by act of parliament keep up the price of corn. Will you now confess that you cannot? You have confessed by your silence that you cannot guarantee the farmer even 30s. a quarter. That delusion is at an end. How is it now, that the farmers can't carry on their business, without political intermeddling, like other people? (Hear.) "Throw the land out of cultivation" by removing the corn law! who say that? The worst farmers in the country. (Hear, and No.) The landlords, rather, of the worst farmed land. Who tell us that the land will not be thrown out of cultivation? The landlords of the best farmed land. (Hear, hear.) I put one prophecy against the other. (I don't think we have any thing to do with them.) Let the question be decided as are other matters, by competition. I object to your pretences for keeping up the price of corn. (Hear, hear.) Those who are most rampant for protection are the landlords, I repeat, of the worst farmed land, the members for Wilts, Dorset, Sussex, Somersetshire, and Devonshire, (A laugh,) the worst farming in the kingdom; and why is it so? Not because the tenants are inferior to those elsewhere; Englishmen are much the same anywhere; but the reason

is there are political landlords, men who will not give their tenants a tenure, but with a view to general elections. (Hear, and No.) You say "No," but I will prove it. (Cheers.) Go into the country yourselves, and where you find the best farmed land, there you find the longest leases. (Hear, and No.) The Lothians, Northumberland, Norfolk, Lincoln—

Colonel SIBTHORP: "No, no." (Great laughter.)

Mr. COBDEN: What, no leases in Lincolnshire?

Colonel SIBTHORP: Not long leases.

Mr. COBDEN: Exactly; I mentioned Lincoln last as being nearer south. (Oh, oh, Hear, hear, and laughter.) Well, on the estates of the Duke of Northumberland, for example, you will find no long leases, and the worst farming; and you will find with long leases good farming even in the midst of bad—and *vice versa*. This is unpalatable of course. (Cries of "It's not true," and "Hear.") Hon. gentlemen say it's not true. (Cheers.) I ask them if they expect farmers to farm well without long leases? ("Yes.") Can you really expect tenants to lay out capital in draining and improvements without long leases? (Hear.) I should feel insulted if anybody offered me a farm, (Laughter,) expecting me to lay out money without the security of a lease. (Hear, hear.) What is the language of the farmers themselves? You must not treat them now as if they believed you "the farmers' friends." (Cheers.) Did you hear the petition I presented from Dorsetshire, agreed to at a meeting of 3,000 farmers and others, and signed by the chairman, a landholder, for the total repeal of the corn laws? This could not be treated as a farmers' question. We will have it put upon a proper footing from this very night. (Laughter.) The corn law, if it does anything, raises rents. I don't come here to tell you it does so. I don't think you understand your own interests. (Hear, hear.) But I know this, that you inflict the greatest possible amount of evil upon the manufacturing and mercantile community, and do no good to either the agriculturists, the manufacturer, or the trader. (Hear, hear.) It may be a very unpalatable question; but what, I ask, are the terms which you wish to make on the new law with your tenants? (Hear, hear, and "Oh!") I do not like the language I have heard upon the subject from landowners. The right hon. baronet (Sir Robert Peel) said the protection had been reduced; but I have heard little talk, at least in public, about reducing rents. (Hear, hear.) However, I have

heard a great deal about the farmers "improving and curtailing their expenses." (Hear, hear.) What says the member for Worcestershire? (Mr. Barneby:) "I have been in Yorkshire, and the worst land there produces as much as the best in this county." What, again, was the language of a noble Earl (Verulam) at St. Alban's? "You must no longer sit before your doors with your pipes in your mouths, and drinking your ale, but you must at once bestir yourselves." What said the member for Somersetshire, (Mr. Miles,) who sometimes appears here in the character of the "farmers' friend?" that "in Scotland they have double our crops, and that this might be secured in this country by improved husbandry." ("Hear, hear," and cheers.) Now, this is not fair language on the part of landowners to farmers; for if protection be reduced the farmers have a right to reduced rents; (Hear, hear;) and if not, let us hear what is the intention of the corn law? (Hear, hear.) We have heard a great deal of ambiguity, during the debate, from the right hon. Vice-President of the Board of Trade, (Mr. Gladstone,) but we have not yet heard what the corn law and the tariff have done. At one time we hear an avowal of reduced prices; next (like putting forward one foot, and then withdrawing it, and advancing the other to erase the foot-trace) we hear that credit was not taken for that. (Hear, hear.) This might not be intended, but it certainly is calculated to deceive the farmers. But the right hon. gentleman said, "Whether the tariff has reduced prices or not, prices had been reduced; and there had been no reason to complain." This sort of ambiguity is not the way now to deal with the farmers. Gentlemen must not regard this as a battle between the farmers and the manufacturers. We propose to make good friends with the farmers. (Laughter and cheers.) Yes; we are their best friends, (Renewed laughter,) their only friends, their best customers; (Laughter and cheers;) and I can tell you this, they are beginning to be sick of the political landlords. ("Hear," and "Oh!") There's a small section of this House now setting themselves up as the real farmers' friends, upon the ruins of the old friendship; (Laughter, and "Hear, hear;") and I can say this, that so badly have they been treated, that they are now inclined to suspect even these new friends, and they say, "What are they after? Don't you think they want to get up a party? Ben't they wishing to make themselves troublesome to the minister, that he may fancy it worth while to offer them something?" (Laughter

and cheers.) The farmers are now disposed utterly to distrust every body who promises them any thing; (Laughter and cheers;) and the very reason they are ready to look on us with friendly eyes (Loud laughter) is, that we never promised them anything. (Cheers.) We tell them distinctly that legislation can do nothing for them. (Hear, hear.) It is a fraud. (Cheers.) They must never allow bargaining for leases and rents to be mixed up with politics. (Hear.) They must deal with their landlords as with their wheelwrights and saddlers, with a view to business, and business alone. (Cheers.) I am fully aware that I have said more than may be quite agreeable to hon. gentlemen opposite. I think it is but fair to exculpate ourselves from the imputations that have been cast upon us by the right hon. gentleman (Sir R. Peel) and the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, that we are seeking for a monopoly for ourselves, as well as to deprive others of their monopoly. Now, what I have to say is this, we want no monopoly; and this I know, that the moment I go amongst the farmers, and say we are for a free trade in coffee, in sugar, in manufactures, in every thing, then the farmers, like honest and just men as they are, at once exclaim, "That is right, that is fair!" (Cheers.) Now I not only say this, but I complain of something else. (Hear, hear.) There was a singular evasion of the question by the right hon. baronet (Sir R. Peel) when he talked of colonial manufactures and colonial produce, and mixed them up with the corn question. Now, what we want is a free trade in everything. Then the right honourable gentleman amalgamated duties for the purposes of protection, and duties for the purposes of revenue; and he would have it believed that we could not carry free trade without interfering with the custom-house duties. Now, we do not want to touch her Majesty at all by what we do. We do not want to touch duties simply for revenue; but we want to prevent certain parties from having a revenue which is of benefit to themselves, but of advantage to none else. On the contrary, what we seek for is the improvement of her Majesty's revenue. What we wish to gain is that improvement. We say that your monopoly gives you a temporary advantage; a temporary, not a permanent advantage, and that you thereby cripple the resources of the revenue. (Hear, hear.) What is the amount of all these protecting duties? The right honourable gentleman spoke of the Herculean task of sweeping away the protecting duties. I this morning went through the whole of those revenue returns, and how much do you think

they amounted to? To two millions per annum, and this included the timber duties, and every other article to which you for your own views give protection. (Cries of "Question.") This is the entire question. (Cheers.) What is, I ask, the difficulty of abolishing protecting duties on manufactures? How much do they produce to the customs? Less than £350,000 a year. Then, the right hon. gentleman has spoken of the cotton trade. How much is paid, think you, for the protection of cotton goods? By the last returns, £8,150 the year. There is no difficulty in a prime minister, in a minister of capacious mind, of enlarged views, of one whose genius leads him to deal with something better than caviare and other trifling articles; such a minister would, I say, find no difficulty in sweeping away the protecting duties. (Hear, hear.) Then, the right hon. gentleman spoke of subverting the whole of our colonial system. What does he mean by subverting the whole of our colonial system? We do profess to subvert the colonial monopolies. It is true that we would do that; but that is not subverting the colonial system. What we would do must benefit the revenue and not injure. The equalization of the duty on sugar would increase the revenue as it has been proved by Mr. M'Gregor, to an amount of not less than £3,000,000 a year. (Cheers.) Take away the monopoly and you benefit the revenue. You might, too, do the same with coffee. You might increase the revenue to the amount of £300,000 a year by the equalization of the duty on coffee. Would it be an injury to the colonies that you left them to all the enjoyments of a free trade? Where is the value of our possessions if they are not able to supply us with articles as cheap and as good as they come from other countries? Why they pay us the same price for our cottons as other countries, and no more. (Hear, hear.) If they cannot supply us with sugar, surely they can supply us with something else. There can, then, be no difficulty in the way of the exchequer of carrying the principle of free trade. I want the Anti-Corn-Law League to be known as the Free-Trade League. I know that hon. gentlemen opposite think that all we want to do is to take away the corn monopoly. The public mind is urged on by us against that key-stone in the arch of monopoly; but I can tell hon. gentlemen opposite, that that organization never will be dispersed until there is a total abrogation of every monopoly. (Cheers.) There has been a great deal of talk of free trade being theoretically, and in the abstract, right. Does the right honourable gentle-

man know what that would lead to? If free trade be theoretically right—if it is as old as truth itself, why is it not applicable to the trade and circumstances of this country? What! truth not to be applicable? then there must be something very false in your system, if truth cannot harmonise with it. (Cheers.) Our object is to make you conform to truth, by making you dispense with your monopolies, and bringing your legislation within the bounds of justice. (Hear, hear.) I thank you for the admission that we have a true cause, and armed with the truth of that cause I appeal to the friends of humanity, I appeal to those on the other side who profess and practice benevolence. I appeal to certain members on the other side of the house, and I appeal especially to a certain noble lord, (Ashley,) and I ask him, can he carry out his schemes of benevolence if he votes for any restriction on the supply of the people's food? If he should vote against the present motion, I ask him, will not he and his friends be viewed with suspicion in the manufacturing districts? We often hear a great deal about charity, but what have we to do with charity? (Cheers from the ministerial benches.) Yes, I say, what have we to do with charity in this house? The people ask for justice, and not charity. We are bound to deal out justice; how can charity be dealt out to an entire nation? Where a nation were the recipients, it was difficult to imagine who could be the donors. I, therefore, exhort the advocates of religion, the advocates of education, the friends of moral and physical improvement, to reflect upon the votes which they are about to give. I ask, what will the country say if such members, patching up a measure of detail, are found voting in the approaching division against the motion of the honourable member for Wolverhampton? I call upon them, therefore, to separate themselves from those with whom they are accustomed to act, unless they are prepared to lose all the influence which they have laboured so hard to acquire in the manufacturing districts. I call upon them to support the present measure if they hope to be useful. There are 7,000,000 or 8,000,000 of men without wheaten bread. If the people continue to descend in the scale

of physical comfort, and to eat potatoes, the hope of moral improvement which the friends of humanity indulge, must be altogether disappointed. The right honourable gentleman the President of the Board of Trade said that the importation of 600,000 quarters of wheat would be a national calamity; but how otherwise are the people to be supported? The Poor Law Commissioners told them that they must add a county as large as Warwick to the territorial extent of the country, or the population of the land must descend to a lower scale of food. They will go on multiplying; no scheme has yet been devised to stop that. You have attempted to bring down the population to the supply; but the evil which you sought to inflict upon them has recoiled upon yourselves. I have now a word to say to the noble lord, the member for London. The noble lord will not vote for this motion; he says he objects to the repeal of the corn laws, but prefers a fixed duty to the sliding scale. Now, I think the noble lord has not treated the great party on this side of the house, nor the country, well, in not stating explicitly the grounds on which he would retain any portion of this obnoxious law. He talked of the exclusive burdens to which he said the land was subject; but he did not specify those burdens. I have the greatest respect for the noble lord, but I venture to tell him that I think it is due to his own reputation, and to the party which acknowledges him for its leader, that he should distinctly state the grounds on which he advocates the imposition of a duty on the importation of corn. (Loud cheers.) As far as I know the feeling out of doors, whatever may be the fate of the motion, however small the numbers in its favour may be, it will not have the slightest effect upon the progress of public opinion on the question. The League will go on, as they have hitherto done. In the course of our agitation we may probably dissolve parliaments and destroy ministries, but still public opinion upon the subject cannot be checked by the division, whatever it may be, and if there be any force in truth and justice, it will go on to an ultimate and not distant triumph. (The hon. member resumed his seat amidst loud cheers.)

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